

# 6

## Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta

The Discourse on the Purely Spiritual | S 36.29 (S:Be 36.31)

Be **Suddhika Sutta** The Discourse on the Pure

Ce **Suddhika,vedanā Sutta** The Discourse on Pure Feelings

Be Ce: **Nirāmisā Sutta** The Discourse on the Spiritual

Theme: Nirvana the highest spiritual state

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2019

### 1 Summary and highlights

#### 1.1 SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE

##### 1.1.1 The 3 levels, 12 kinds of experiences

**1.1.1.1 The Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta** (S 36.29) defines experience in personal or individual terms, that is, as 4 levels of “feeling” (uncountable) or some kind of direct experience, by way of “zest” (or rapture), joy (or happiness), equanimity and liberation, each at 3 levels—the carnal (or worldly), the spiritual and the superspiritual—totalling 12 kinds, summarized graphically, thus:

		<u>carnal</u>		<u>spiritual</u>		<u>superspiritual</u>
(1) zest [rapture]	<i>pīti</i>	sense-pleasures	[\$5]	1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> dhyanas	[\$6]	the arhat [\$7]
(2) joy [happiness]	<i>sukha</i>	sense-pleasures	[\$8]	1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> dhyanas	[\$9]	the arhat [\$10]
(3) equanimity	<i>upekkhā</i>	sense-pleasures	[\$11]	4 <sup>th</sup> dhyana	[\$12]	the arhat [\$13]
(4) liberation	<i>vimokkha</i>	form dhyana	[\$14]	formless dhyana	[\$15]	the arhat [\$16]

**1.1.1.2** In our own times, we often distinguish between the “religious” and the “spiritual.” **The religious** refers generally to organized religion or any kind of belief in the supernatural (some kind of external agency) that decides our fate or is able to change it in some way, even in some kind of “reward-punishment” (consequentialist) ethics. Hence, the essence of religion, is invariably, some kind of power. In this sense, religion is “goal-oriented”; hence, worldly (*s’āmisā*).

**1.1.1.3 The spiritual** is a convenient word for those who reject religion or who prefer some kind of “individualistic” or “person-centred” latitude in the meaning and purpose of life. There is often an important element of philosophical or intellectual acumen for “spiritual” people that allows them to define their life or “life” in general by their own scale of merits and demerits of things. In short, it may be a psychological reaction against religion. Hence, it may be said to be “purpose-oriented” in rejecting religion or what it signifies (*nirāmisā*).

**1.1.1.4 The superspiritual** (*nirāmisā nirāmisā,tara*, literally, “the spiritual that is more than spiritual”) is, in an important sense, the most “self-centred” of the 3 terms. The “self” here refers to our own mind and how it constructs the ideas of the religious and the spiritual. Hence, this is a kind of exploratory and developmental approach that deconstructs what holds us back by mind-constructed notions and ways.

Such a deconstruction begins with an understanding of what the “constructed” is, and how or why this occurs. Then, there is “spiritual deconstruction,” the dismantling of what hurts and hinders our mind; finally, the deconstructed mind is a self-liberated mind that sees truth and beauty, things as they really are.

### 1.1.2 The 3 levels of experiences

**1.1.2.1** The **carnal**, that is, the physical or worldly aspects, refers basically to the 5 cords of sense-desire (*pañca kāma,guṇa*) and the 5 sense-objects. In other words, this is worldly **sense-based** joy, experienced by beings of the sense-world. One is liberated from the sense-world by attaining the form dhyana. But this is only a temporary liberation, one that lasts only for the duration of the dhyanic meditation and its emergent (post-dhyanic) effects.

**1.1.2.2** The **spiritual** aspect refers to the dhyana or meditation absorption (*jhāna*), quite detached and aloof from sensual pleasures. This is the “spiritual” or transomatic (beyond the body) joy and happiness of the form dhyanas and the formless dhyanas. Such experiences are more characterized by an experience of beauty in its highest sense; hence, attended by commensurate joy. Yet, at this level, our vision of truth still needs significant working.

“A thing of beauty” may be a joy forever, but the idea of “thing” defines the “forever.” There is still the dominance of thinking over feeling, especially thinking in terms of some kind of “self” or abiding essence. Hence, we are still guided by *ideas* of things, but our own self-projections. There is an effective lack of a truly direct experience of true reality. We are only *seeing* beauty (which is good in itself), but we have yet to taste, to *be*, that beauty.

**1.1.2.3** The last—**spiritual liberation**—is the cessation of the 3 roots of worldliness, lust, ill will and delusion, in the arhat who has true *joy, happiness, equanimity and liberation* by the destruction of the mental influxes (*khīṇāsava*).<sup>1</sup> This is the feeling of **the arhats** (which includes the Buddha): their joy, happiness and equanimity are of the “highest” or “superspiritual” kind, that is to say: they will not rearise in any of the 3 worlds (the sense-based, the form-based or the formless), or anywhere else. They enjoy nirvanic bliss in this life and attain nirvana after death.

**1.1.2.4 The Buddha and the arhats** have feelings, too. In a sense, they can experience whatever we experience, good and bad. They *can* experience our human or unawakened emotions in the sense that they know the true nature of these emotions, and are in no way overwhelmed, defined or defiled, by them.

We can use an analogy to illustrate this: imagine an experienced doctor examining a sick person: the doctor sees all the symptoms and understands what is going on, but is not lustful, hateful or deluded by them (in a professional sense at least). When the patient recovers, the doctor is happy (in a professional way). Even when the doctor fails to heal the patient and he dies, the doctor professionally remains calm and goes on working. [1.2.1.2]

## **1.2 RELATED TEACHINGS**

### **1.2.1 Nirāmisam sukham vedanam**

**1.2.1.1** This phrase meaning, “spiritual pleasant feeling,” is found in **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22), **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), **the Pañca-t, taya Sutta** (M 102) and **the Vibhaṅga**.<sup>2</sup> Here *nirāmisam*

<sup>1</sup> *Khīṇa* (destroyed) + *āsava* (influxes). The mental influxes are those of sensual lust, existence, ignorance; later lists add “views” as the 3<sup>rd</sup>: see SD 30.3 (1.3.2).

<sup>2</sup> **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22/2:298,17), SD 13.2; **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,32(2)/1:59,17), SD 13.3; **Pañca-t, taya S** (M 102/2:236,9 etc), SD 40a.12; Vbh 195,33, 196,13+32. See also A 1:81, 3:412; Pm 2:233. See also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:43 f.

means “non-sensual,” “non-carnal” or “spiritual,” which according to the Majjhima Commentary refers to the 6 joyful feelings connected with the sense-doors, but not dependent on sense-desire (MA 1:279).

**1.2.1.2** Arhats (including the Buddha), insofar as they are humans, as a rule, have the 6 sense-faculties: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. In fact, their faculties function much better than those of the unawakened since the arhats are always mindful. To have senses also means to **feel**, that is, to experience the pleasant, unpleasant and the neutral.

Hence, the arhats, too, feel and experience these 3 kinds of feelings. However, unlike the unawakened, they are always mindful and naturally free from lust, hate and delusion. Hence, they merely experience these feelings and do not *react* negatively or unwholesomely to them. [1.1.2.4]

**The Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21) records the Buddha appreciating the gandharva Pañca,sikha’s recital of verses accompanied by his veena, saying:

“The sound of your strings, Pañca,sikha, blended [harmonized] well with your singing, and your singing blended well with the sound of your strings. Moreover, Pañca,sikha, neither did your veena out-pace your song, nor your singing out-pace your veena.” (D 21,1.6).<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.2 The 7 aspects of feelings

**1.2.2.0 The Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Pm) (an Abhidhamma work preserved as one of the 15 books of the Khuddaka Nikāya) can be a difficult text to read, but it gives detailed explanations, even instructions, on practical aspects of Buddhist meditation. Here are excerpts from Pm defining and describing the contemplation of feelings (*vedanā’nupassanā*). Pm, near its very end, in its “Wisdom” chapter (*pañhā,vagga*) on “Talk on Satipatthana” (*satipaṭṭhāna,kathā*), explains that it comprises the following 7 aspects (with the preamble):

“How does one dwell contemplating **feelings as feeling**?

**1.2.2.1** (1) Here, one contemplates **pleasant feeling** (*sukham vedanam*)

as impermanent, not as permanent;

as suffering, not as pleasant;

as nonself, not as self;

one is revulsed (at it), one delights not;

one makes it (lust) fade away, not inflame it;

one makes an end (of suffering); not let it arise;

one relinquishes (defilements); not cling to them”

*aniccato anupassati no sukhato*

*dukkhato anupassati no sukhato*

*anattato anupassati no attato*

*nibbindati no nandati*

*virajjati no rajjati*

*nirodheti no samudeti*

*paṭinissajjati no ādiyati.*

One contemplates feelings in these 7 aspects:

**(1)** The *feeling* is the establishment, not the mindfulness.

**(2)** Mindfulness is both the establishment and the mindfulness.

**(3)** By means of that mindfulness and that knowledge, he contemplates that *feeling*.

Hence, it is called “the cultivation of satipatthana consisting in contemplating the feelings as feeling.”

In terms of **cultivation**, there are 4 kinds.<sup>4</sup>

therein, cultivation by way of:

*vedanā upaṭṭhānam no sati*

*sati upaṭṭhānam c’eva sati ca*

*tena vuccati: vedanāsu vedanā’nupassanā satipaṭṭhāna,bhavanā*

<sup>3</sup> See esp the related discussion at SD 54.8 (5.2). On “**How saints feel**,” see SD 55.20.

<sup>4</sup> This tr is based on that of Bh Nāṇamoli (Pm:Ñ 1982:399).

(4) non-excess of ideas [thoughts] <sup>5</sup> arising therein;	<i>jātānaṃ dhammānaṃ anativattan'aṭṭhena bhāvanā</i>
(5) single function ( <i>rasa</i> ) <sup>6</sup> of the spiritual faculties; <sup>7</sup>	<i>indriyānaṃ eka,ras'aṭṭhena bhāvanā</i>
(6) effectiveness of the appropriate effort; <sup>8</sup>	<i>tad-upaga,viriya,vāhan'aṭṭhena bhāvanā</i>
(7) repetition <sup>9</sup> [resorting to that practice].	<i>āsevan'aṭṭhena bhāvanā</i> (Pm 233)

**1.2.2.2** This whole template [1.2.2.1] is then applied to *each* of the following 9 kinds of feelings:

(2) <i>dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	painful feeling
(3) <i>adukkham-asukhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	neither painful nor pleasant feeling
(4) <i>s'āmisam sukhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	carnal pleasant feeling
(5) <i>nirāmisam sukhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	spiritual pleasant feeling
(6) <i>s'āmisam dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	carnal painful feeling
(7) <i>nirāmisam dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	spiritual painful feeling
(8) <i>s'āmisam adukkham-asukhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	carnal neither painful nor pleasant feeling
(9) <i>nirāmisam adukkham-asukhaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	spiritual neither painful nor pleasant feeling
(a) <i>cakkhu,samphassa,jaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	feeling arising from eye-contact
(b) <i>sota,samphassa,jaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	feeling arising from ear-contact
(c) <i>ghāna,samphassa,jaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	feeling arising from nose-contact
(d) <i>jivhā,samphassa,jaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	feeling arising from tongue-contact
(e) <i>kaya,samphassa,jaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	feeling arising from body-contact
(f) <i>mano,samphassa,jaṃ vedanaṃ</i>	feeling arising from mind-contact (Pm 233)

For our purpose, which is **the reflection on feeling** (*vedanā'nupassanā*), we can reflect on each of the 6 kinds of sense-based feelings (a)-(f) in “feeling cycle” (\**vedanā,vāra*) (1)-(4), (6) and (8). As for the cases of the “spiritual” feelings (5), (7) and (9), as stated here, only (f) “feeling arising from mental contact” applies, since “spiritual” refers to the form dhyanas and formless attainments. The arhat’s “super-spiritual” feelings [1.2.3] are not listed here.

### **1.2.3 Wholesome meditative experiences**

**1.2.3.1** In the **Saḷāyatana,vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 137), *s'āmisā* and *nirāmisā* refer to the household life and to the renounced life respectively. Here, too, these two terms are clearly translated as “worldly, religious” and “spiritual.” In early Buddhist terms, even religious experiences, as long as they are rooted in some kind of external agency or abiding essence (like God or Soul), they are regarded as “worldly.”

**1.2.3.2** Only a wholesome experience which is not rooted in greed, hate or delusion, and sees non-self is said to be spiritual.<sup>10</sup> This is the case in the **Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta** (S 36.29), where we find the terms “spiritual zest” (*nirāmisā pīti*), “spiritual joy” (*nirāmisā sukha*) and “spiritual equanimity” (*nirāmisā upekkhā*), which are terms for the feelings experienced in the dhyanas [§§8-15].

<sup>5</sup> On the “non-excess of ideas,” see Pm 1:31 f (Pm:Ñ 31-33).

<sup>6</sup> On the “single function” of the faculties, see Pm 1:33 f (Pm:Ñ 33 f).

<sup>7</sup> These are the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*), those of: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, see: **Pañc'indriya** (SD 10.4); also SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).

<sup>8</sup> On effective effort, see Pm 1:34 (Pm:Ñ 33 f).

<sup>9</sup> On “repetition,” see Pm 1:30, 34 (Pm:Ñ 31, 34).

<sup>10</sup> See M 137/3:217-219 (SD 29.5); MA 279; VbhA 268.

### 1.2.4 Awakened feelings

**1.2.4.1 The Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta** (S 36.29) introduces a remarkable term: “superspiritual” (*nirāmisā nirāmisā, tara*), which describes the feelings of the arhats, fully self-awakened ones, including the Buddha. This is a category in itself—or better, it is a “non-category,” since it refers to the awakened state. It is *literally* said to be “more spiritual than the spiritual” (*nirāmisā nirāmisā, tara*). In other words, it goes beyond the dichotomy of the worldly (*s’āmisā*) and the spiritual (*nirāmisā*), where the “religious” straddle the two. [1.1.1.4]

**1.2.4.2** This phrase *nirāmisā nirāmisā, tara* (superspiritual) is found only here in **the Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta** (S 36.29), the Paṭisambhidā, magga [1.2.3.3] and their respective Commentaries. However, the terms *s’āmisā* (carnal) and *nirāmisā* (spiritual) are common throughout the Nikāyas. We have already mentioned *nirāmisā* [1.2.3]. Here we will examine mostly *s’āmisā*, as defined in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga**, where *s’āmisā* as “should be directly understood” (*abhiññeyyam*) as characterizing the 1<sup>st</sup> truth (suffering) or the “worldly,” and *nirāmisā* as referring to the 3<sup>rd</sup> truth (ending of suffering) or the “spiritual,” as follows, of which the first sentence reads:

“It should be directly understood: arising is worldly, non-arising is spiritual [non-worldly],” thus:

			<u>worldly</u>	<u>spiritual</u>
<i>uppādo s’āmisam,</i>	<i>anuppādo nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	arising	non-arising
<i>pavattam s’āmisam,</i>	<i>appavattam nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	occurrence	non-occurrence
<i>nimittam s’āmisam,</i>	<i>animittam nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	the sign <sup>11</sup>	the signless
<i>āyūhanā s’āmisam,</i>	<i>anāyūhanā nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	accumulation	non-accumulation
<i>paṭisandhi s’āmisam,</i>	<i>appaṭisandhi nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	rebirth-linking	non-rebirth-linking
<i>gati s’āmisam,</i>	<i>agati nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	destiny	non-destiny
<i>nibbatti s’āmisam,</i>	<i>anibbatti nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	generation	non-generation
<i>upapatti s’āmisam,</i>	<i>anupapatti nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	rebirth	non-rebirth
<i>jāti s’āmisam,</i>	<i>ajāti nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	birth	non-birth
<i>jarā s’āmisam,</i>	<i>ajarā nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	decay [ageing]	non-decay
<i>vyādhi s’āmisam,</i>	<i>avyādhi nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	disease	non-disease
<i>maraṇam s’āmisam,</i>	<i>amataṇam nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	death	non-death
<i>soko s’āmisam,</i>	<i>asoko nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	sorrow	non-sorrow
<i>paridevo s’āmisam,</i>	<i>aparidevo nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	lamenting	non-lamenting
<i>upāyāso s’āmisam,</i>	<i>anupāyāso nirāmisam’ti</i>	<i>abhiññeyyam.</i>	despair	non-despair

(Pm 1:14)

The “worldly” clearly are names for samsara (the cycle of lives and deaths), while the “spiritual” refers to nirvana.

### 1.3 RELATED TERMS

#### 1.3.1 Paṭisambhidā, magga explanations

**1.3.1.1 The Paṭisambhidā, magga**, in its comprehensive list of “liberations” (*vimokkha*), defines the 3 terms of **the Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta** (S 36.29) as follows:

<sup>11</sup> “The sign” of a formation (*saṅkhāra*).

“**Carnal [worldly] liberation**” (*s’āmiso vimokkho*) is “liberation connected with form [matter]” (*rūpa-p,paṭisaññutto vimokkho*).

“**Spiritual liberation**” (*nirāmiso vimokkho*) is “liberation connected with formlessness [the non-material]” (*arūpa-p,paṭisaññutto vimokkho*).

“**Superspiritual liberation**” (*nirāmisā nirāmisataro vimokkho*) is “the 4 noble paths, the 4 fruits of recluseship, and nirvana” (*cattāro ca ariyamaggā, cattāri ca sāmāñña, phalāni, nibbānañ ca*). (Pm 2:40 f)

**1.3.1.2 The Paṭisambhidā, magga Commentary** tersely confirms these textual explanations as follows:

*Rūpa, saṅkhātena saha āmisenāti s’āmiso  
sabbaso rūpārūpa-p, pahānā nirāmisato’pi  
nirāmisa, taro’ti nirāmisā nirāmisa, taro.*

*S’āmiso* means the carnal, in connection with form;  
*nirāmisa* abandons all, both form and the formless;  
*nirāmisā nirāmisa, tara* is beyond (even) the “spiritual.”  
(PmA 3:552,29-31)

**1.3.1.3** Interestingly, “form” (*rūpa*) in the 1<sup>st</sup> line, defining the “carnal or worldly” (*s’āmisa*) [1.3.1.2] is pregnant with *both* the sense of “material form” (*rūpa* as the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 5 aggregates, as a *khandha*)<sup>12</sup> and “fine-material form” (*rūpa* of the 3 worlds, as a *loka*).<sup>13</sup> Hence, *s’āmisa* here has the sense of “the worldly.”

The “spiritual” (*nirāmisa*), then, is beyond all the worldliness of *rūpa* thus understood. We have transcended neither the form dhyanas nor the formless attainments. When, as dhyana-meditators, we have attained these high mental states, we understand them as “mind-made,” and hence, unsatisfactory and nonself.

We need to cultivate further as taught by the Buddha. When we have truly understood the true nature of these meditation, or on a simpler level, our own mind, then we take the very first step on the path, that is, **streamwinning**. The “superspiritual” liberation refers to any of the stages of the path from streamwinning to arhathood [1.3.1.1].

### **1.3.2 Āmisa and dhamma**

**1.3.2.1** There is also the term *āmisa* (material, worldly), which is contrasted with *dhamma* (adj, “spiritual”; n “the Dhamma”), as in **the Duka Nipāta** (the book of twos) in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, that is, **the Dve Dāna Sutta** (A 2.13.1 or A 2.141):

*Dve’ māni bhikkhave dānāni.  
Katamāni dve?  
Āmisa, dānañ ca dhamma, dānañ ca.  
Imāni kho bhikkhave dve dānāni  
Etadaggañ, bhikkhave, imesaṃ dvinnarā  
dānānarā yad idarā dhamma, dānan’ ti.*

Bhikshus, there are these 2 kinds of giving,  
What are the two?  
Material [worldly] giving and dharma-giving.  
These, bhikshus, are the 2 kinds of giving.  
Of these 2 kinds of giving, bhikshus, the foremost  
is dharma-giving. (A 2.13.1/1:91), SD 55.6(1.2)

**1.3.2.2** Here, we can take *dhamma* (adj), “dharma,” as synonymous with *nirāmisa*, “the spiritual.” This kind of giving ranges from teaching, translating, disseminating to preserving the Buddha Dhamma, that is, those teachings that clarify the noble eightfold path and how we can attain it, that is, by at least aspiring for streamwinning.

<sup>12</sup> On the aggregate *rūpa* (*rūpa-k, khandha*), see SD 17.2a.

<sup>13</sup> On the 3 worlds (*loka*)— sense-world (*kāma, loka*), form world (*rūpa, loka*) and formless world (*arūpa, loka*)— see **Viññāṇa-ṭ, thiti**, SD 23.14; SD 29.6a (5.2); SD 29.6b (7.2).

## **2 The (Vedanā) Āgāra Sutta (S 36.14), SD 74.10<sup>14</sup>**

### **2.1 COMMENTARIAL EXPLANATION OF S'ĀMISA AND NIRĀMISA (SA 3:79,9-17)**

#### **2.1.1 Pleasant feelings**

**Carnal** (*s'āmisa*) pleasant feeling is pleasant feeling arisen dependent on *carnal* sensuality.

**Spiritual** (*nirāmisā*) pleasant feeling is pleasant feeling arisen by way of the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana, etc, or by way of insight, or by way of recollection (of the Buddha, etc).<sup>15</sup>

#### **2.1.2 Painful feelings**

**Carnal** painful feeling is painful feeling arisen through carnal sensuality. (This is the painful feeling of those who undergo suffering because of sensuality. SAPṬ:Be 2:358.)

**Spiritual** painful feeling is the feeling of displeasure (*domanassa*) arisen through yearning for the supreme liberation (namely, the fruition of arhathood. SAPṬ)

#### **2.1.3 Neutral feelings**

**Carnal** neutral feeling is the neutral feeling arisen through carnal sensuality.

**Spiritual** neutral feeling is the neutral feeling arisen by way of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana.

### **2.2 THE (VEDANĀ) DISCOURSE ON THE HOUSE (S 36.14), SD 55.4(2.2)**

#### **SD 55.4(2)**

## **(Vedanā) Āgāra Sutta**

The (Vedanā) Discourse on the House | S 36.14/4:219 = SD 74.10 (qv)  
 or, **(Vedanā) Āgantuk'āgāra Sutta**, The (Vedanā) Discourse on the Guest-house  
 Traditional: S 4.2.2.4 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 2, Vedanā Saṃyutta 2, Rahogata Vg 4  
 Theme: The 3 kinds of feeling: the carnal and the spiritual

#### **THE PARABLE OF THE GUEST-HOUSE**

- 1 Bhikshus, suppose there is a **guest-house** (*āgantuk'āgāra*).
- 1.2 People coming from the east lodge there.  
     people coming from the west lodge there;  
     people coming from the north lodge there;  
     people coming from the south lodge there.
- 1.3 Kshatriyas [nobles], too, lodge there;  
     brahmins [priests], too, lodge there;  
     vaishyas [merchants], too, lodge there;  
     shudras [workers], too, lodge there.
- 2 Even so, bhikshus, various feelings arise in the body:

<sup>14</sup> S 36.14/4:219,9-23 (SD 74.10), tr 190720. A fuller study is found at SD 74.10.

<sup>15</sup> This last (*anussati,vasena ca uppannā vedanā*) is omitted from SA:Ee, but found in SA:Be 3:119.

### 3 THE 3 KINDS OF FEELING

pleasant feeling arises, too; *sukhā pi vedanā uppajjanti*  
painful feeling arises, too; *dukkha pi vedanā uppajjanti*  
neither painful nor pleasant [neutral] feeling arises, too. *adukkham-asukhā pi vedanā uppajjanti*

### 4 THE 2 KINDS OF FEELING

#### 4.1 CARNAL FEELINGS

Carnal pleasant feeling arises, too; *(s'āmisā vedanā)*  
carnal painful feeling arises, too; *s'āmisa pi sukhā vedanā uppajjanti*  
carnal neither painful nor pleasant feeling arises, too. *s'āmisa pi dukkha vedanā uppajjanti*  
*s'āmisa pi adukkham-asukha vedanā uppajjanti*

#### 4.2 SPIRITUAL FEELINGS

Spiritual pleasant feeling arises, too; *(nirāmisa vedanā)*  
spiritual painful feeling arises, too; *nirāmisa pi sukhā vedanā uppajjanti*  
spiritual neither painful nor pleasant feeling arises, too. *nirāmisa pi dukkha vedanā uppajjanti*  
*nirāmisa pi adukkham-asukha vedanā uppajjanti*

— evaṃ —

## Suddhika Nirāmisa Sutta

### The Discourse on the Purely Spiritual

S 36.29

#### The 3 levels of spiritual experiences

I Bhikshus, there is carnal zest [rapture];  
there is spiritual zest;  
there is the zest that is superspiritual [more than spiritual].

II There is carnal joy [happiness];  
there is spiritual joy;  
there is the joy that is superspiritual [more than spiritual].

III Bhikshus, there is carnal equanimity;  
there is spiritual equanimity;  
there is the equanimity that is superspiritual [more than spiritual].

IV There is carnal liberation;  
there is spiritual liberation;  
there is the liberation that is superspiritual [more than spiritual].

*s'āmisa pīti*  
*nirāmisa pīti*  
*nirāmisa nirāmisa,tara pīti*  
*s'āmisa sukha*  
*nirāmisa sukha*  
*nirāmisa nirāmisa,tara sukha*

*s'āmisa upekkhā*  
*nirāmisa upekkhā*  
*nirāmisa nirāmisa,tara upekkhā*  
*s'āmisa vimokkha*  
*nirāmisa vimokkha*  
*nirāmisa nirāmisa,tara vimokkha*

#### I. The 3 levels of zest (pīti)

##### I a. THE 5 CORDS OF SENSE-PLEASURES

5 And what, bhikshus, is carnal zest?

*s'āmisa pīti*



There are, bhikshus, **the 5 cords of sense-pleasures**.<sup>16</sup>

*pañca kāma,guṇa*

- (1) **Visual forms** cognizable by the eye  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.<sup>17</sup>
  - (2) **Sounds** cognizable by the ear  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
  - (3) **Smells** cognizable by the nose  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
  - (4) **Tastes** cognizable by the tongue  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
  - (5) **Touches** cognizable by the body  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- These, bhikshus, are the 5 cords of sensual pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

5.2 Bhikshus, the zest that arises dependent on these 5 cords of sensual pleasure—  
this, bhikshus, is called carnal zest.<sup>19</sup> [236]

#### I b. THE FIRST 2 DHYANAS

**6** And what, bhikshus, is **spiritual zest**?

6.2 Here, bhikshus, a monk,  
quite secluded [detached] from sense-objects,<sup>20</sup> secluded from unwholesome mental states,  
he attains and dwells in **the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana**,  
accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and  
with zest and joy born of solitude;<sup>21</sup>

6.3 with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,  
by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,  
he attains and dwells in **the 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana**,  
free from initial application and sustained application,

<sup>16</sup> The 5 cords of sensual pleasure (*pañca kāma,guṇa*), so called because they are the objects of the 5 physical senses, eg: **V** 1:3, 17, 225, 293, **3**:111; **D** 8/1:172 (the 6 sense-bases); **M** 13,7/1:47 n (SD 6.9), **13**,7/1:85; **S** 36.19/-4:225, **6.31**/4:235+237, **45.30**/5:22, **45.176**/5:60, **47.6**/5:148, **47.7**/5:149; **A** 6.63/3.411,4, **9.35**/4:415,4, **9.42**/4:-449,13, **9.65**/4:458,15, **10.99**/5:203,22,; **Dh** 48, 415; **Sn** 436; **Tha** 254; **J** 423/3:466, **467**/4:172+173, **507**/4:469, **542**-/6:127; **Ap** 547; **Nm** 1; **Vbh** 256; **Mvst** 3.417.2; **MA** 1:199, 131, 2:261; listed at **D** 33,2.1(3)/3:234; ref to at **D** 21,11/-2:271,26; **29**,23/3:131,5; **S** 12.63/2:99, **35.117**/4:97 *Kāma,guṇa S*; **A** 6.26/3:315,3, **4.122**/2:125,17, **5.34**/3:40,23, **6.25**/3:312,25+ 313,16, **6.63**,3.2 + SD 6.11 (2.2.2.6), **7.65**/4:118,9, **8.35**/4:239,10, **5.55**/3:69,8\*, **5.148**/3:172,26, **6.26**/3:315,12, **7.48**/4:55,18, **10.177**/5:272,15 +273,1, **35.241**/4:180. They are both objects of desire as well as the qualities of desire, ie, that which brings pleasure to the senses, or desirable sense-experience, as listed in the passage here. They are “cords” (*guṇa*) because they bind one to them, and they “multiply” (*guṇa*) themselves as a result, binding one ever tighter to them. *Kāma* is also desire personified, ie the god of love, sometimes identified with Māra (Tha 3.88; BA 289). It is interesting to note here that there is no “mental pleasure” (*somanassa*) in the list. Such mental pleasures generally arise through mental focus or meditation, and as such are not regarded as *guṇa*, insofar as they provide a lasting sense of satisfaction and inner peace that lead to letting-go.

<sup>17</sup> *Cakkhu,viññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piya,rūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā.*

<sup>18</sup> At **Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 13,7), this whole passage on the 5 cords of sense-pleasure define “the gratification (*assāda*) with regards to sense-desires” (SD 6.9).

<sup>19</sup> *Yā kho bhikkhave ime pañca kāma,guṇe paṭicca uppajjati pīti, ayam vuccati bhikkhave s’āmisā pīti.* See (1.1.1.2).

<sup>20</sup> On the tr of *kāmehi* (pl), see SD 8.4 (5.1.1.1).

<sup>21</sup> “Born of solitude,” *viveka,ja*; ie, it is the result of abandoning the hindrances: on the 3 kinds of solitude, see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (1.5). On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “stillness” (*samādhi*) here, see **The layman and dhyana** @ SD 8.5. The 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana is described more elaborately, with a parable, in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,77), SD 8.10.

with zest and joy born of stillness [samadhi]<sup>22</sup>—  
this, bhikshus, is called spiritual zest.<sup>23</sup>

I C. AN ARHAT’S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE

**7** And what, bhikshus, is **superspiritual zest** [more than the spiritual]?  
Bhikshus, when a monk, **whose influxes are destroyed**,  
reviews his mind liberated from *greed*,  
*reviews* his mind liberated from *hate*,  
*reviews* his mind liberated from *delusion*—**zest** arises<sup>24</sup>—  
this, bhikshus, is called superspiritual zest.<sup>25</sup>

## II. The 3 levels of joy (*sukha*)

II a. THE 5 CORDS OF SENSE-PLEASURES

**8** And what, bhikshus, is **carnal joy [worldly happiness]**? *s’āmisa sukha*  
There are, bhikshus, **the 5 cords of sense-pleasures**. *pañca kāma,guṇa*

- (1) **Visual forms** cognizable by the eye  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.<sup>26</sup>
  - (2) **Sounds** cognizable by the ear  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
  - (3) **Smells** cognizable by the nose  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
  - (4) **Tastes** cognizable by the tongue  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
  - (5) **Touches** cognizable by the body  
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- These, bhikshus, are the 5 cords of sensual pleasure.<sup>27</sup>

8.2 Bhikshus, the happiness and mental joy<sup>28</sup> that arise dependent on these 5 cords of sensual pleasure—this, bhikshus, is called **carnal joy**.

<sup>22</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya,tuṇhī,bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka,vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī,saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate). See **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.-2/4:263 f), SD 24.12. The 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana is described more elaborately, with a parable, in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,79), SD 8.10.

<sup>23</sup> See (1.1.1.3).

<sup>24</sup> The whole passage up to here: *Yā kho bhikkhave khīṇ’āsavassa bhikkhuno rāgā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, dosā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, mohā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, uppañjati pīti.*

<sup>25</sup> This is “more spiritual than” the spiritual zest of the dhyanas (*nirāmisa,tarā’ti nirāmisāya jhāna,pīti pi nirāmisa.-tarā*) (SA 3:84,25).

<sup>26</sup> *Cakkhu,viññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piya,rūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajaniyā.*

<sup>27</sup> At **Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 13,7), this whole passage on the 5 cords of sense-pleasure define “the gratification (*assāda*) with regards to sense-desires” (SD 6.9).

<sup>28</sup> “The happiness and mental joy,” *sukha,somanassa*; alt, “the joy that is mental bliss.” These are purely *mental* states. Omitted in S:B 1284.

## II b. THE FIRST 3 DHYANAS

**9** And what, bhikshus, is **spiritual joy** (*nirāmisā sukha*)?

9.2 Here, bhikshus, a monk,  
quite secluded [detached] from sense-objects,<sup>29</sup> secluded from unwholesome mental states,  
he attains and dwells in **the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana**, [§6.2]

accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and  
with zest and joy born of solitude;

9.3 with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,  
by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,  
he attains and dwells in **the 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana**, [§6.3]

free from initial application and sustained application,  
with zest and joy born of stillness [samadhi];

9.4 and with the fading away of zest,

he remains equanimous, mindful and clearly understanding, and  
feels joy with the body.<sup>30</sup>

He attains and dwells in **the 3<sup>rd</sup> dhyana**,

of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness’<sup>31</sup>—  
this, bhikshus, is called spiritual joy.

## II c. AN ARHAT’S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE

**10** And what, bhikshus, is **superspiritual joy** [superspiritual joy] (*nirāmisā nirāmisā, tara sukha*)?

Bhikshus, when a monk, **whose influxes are destroyed**,  
reviews his mind liberated from *greed*,

*reviews* his mind liberated from *hate*, [237]

*reviews* his mind liberated from *delusion*—**happiness and mental joy** arise<sup>32</sup> [§8.2]—  
this, bhikshus, is called superspiritual joy.<sup>33</sup>

III. The 3 levels of equanimity (*upekkhā*)

## III a. THE 5 CORDS OF SENSE-PLEASURES

**11** And what, bhikshus, is **carnal equanimity**?

There are, bhikshus, **the 5 cords of sense-pleasures**.

*s’āmisā upekkhā*

*pañca kāma, guṇa*

(1) **Visual forms** cognizable by the eye

that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.<sup>34</sup>

(2) **Sounds** cognizable by the ear

that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.

(3) **Smells** cognizable by the nose

<sup>29</sup> On the tr of *kāmehi* (pl), see SD 8.4 (5.1.1.1).

<sup>30</sup> On this point, see **The Buddha discovers dhyana** @ SD 33.1b (6.4.1): On coming out of dhyana.

<sup>31</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> dhyana is described more elaborately, with a parable, in **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,81), SD 8.10.

<sup>32</sup> The whole passage up to here: *Yaṃ kho bhikkhave khīṇ’āsavassa bhikkhuno rāgā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, dosā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, mohā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, uppajjati sukham somanas-saṃ.*

<sup>33</sup> *Nirāmisā nirāmisā, tarā pīti*. Comy explains *nirāmisā* here as meaning “More spiritual than the spiritual zest of the dhyanas,” ie, surpassing dhyanic zest (SA 3:84,25 f). See (1.1.1.4).

<sup>34</sup> *Cakkhu, viññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piya, rūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā.*

that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.

(4) **Tastes** cognizable by the tongue

that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.

(5) **Touches** cognizable by the body

that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.

These, bhikshus, are the 5 cords of sensual pleasure.<sup>35</sup>

11.2 Bhikshus, the equanimity that arises dependent on these 5 cords of sensual pleasure—this, bhikshus, is called **carnal equanimity**.

### III b. THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DHYANA

**12** And what, bhikshus, is **spiritual equanimity**? (*nirāmisā upekkhā*)

12.2 Here, bhikshus, a monk,

with the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain,<sup>36</sup>

and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure,

he attains and dwells in **the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana**

that is neither painful nor pleasant, and

with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity<sup>37</sup>—

this, bhikshus, is called **spiritual equanimity**.

### III c. AN ARHAT'S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE

**13** And what, bhikshus, is **superspiritual equanimity**? (*nirāmisā nirāmisatarā upekkhā*)

13.2 Bhikshus, when a monk, **whose influxes are destroyed**,

reviews his mind liberated from *greed*,

*reviews* his mind liberated from *hate*,

*reviews* his mind liberated from *delusion*—**equanimity** arises<sup>38</sup> [§8.2]—

this, bhikshus, is called **superspiritual equanimity**.

## IV. The 3 levels of liberation (*vimokkha*)

### IV a. LIBERATION FROM FORM

**14** And what, bhikshus, is **carnal liberation**?

Carnal liberation is liberation connected with **form**.<sup>39</sup>

*s'āmisā vimokkha*  
*rūpa-p,paṭisaṃyutta*  
*vimokkha*

<sup>35</sup> At **Mahā Dukka-k,khandha S** (M 13,7), this whole passage on the 5 cords of sense-pleasure define “the gratification (*assāda*) with regards to sense-desires” (SD 6.9).

<sup>36</sup> “Joy and pain,” *sukha-dukkha*: this refers to the physical feelings. The next phrase—“pleasure and displeasure,” *domanassa-somanassa*—refers to mental feelings, which have been transcended earlier. Mental feelings need to be overcome first so that the mind is not distracted by itself, as it were. Then, all the other feelings (arising from the physical sense-contacts) are transcended: on its significance, see **Sall'atthana S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5.

<sup>37</sup> Here, **Vibhaṅga** gives 3 factors of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana—equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek'aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165). The 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana is described more elaborately, with a parable, in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,83), SD 8.10. See also **Dhyana** @ SD 8.4 (5.4).

<sup>38</sup> The whole passage up to here: *Yā kho bhikkhave khīṇ'āsavassa bhikkhuno rāgā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, dosā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, mohā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, uppajjati upekkhā.*

<sup>39</sup> *Rūpa-p,paṭisaṃyutto vimokkha s'āmisā vimokkha*. Here “form” (*rūpa*) has a broad sense encompassing the sense-sphere and the form-sphere. See (1.1.2.1) and foll n.

## IV b. LIBERATION FROM THE FORMLESS SPHERE

**15** And what, bhikshus, is **spiritual liberation** (*nirāmisā vimokkha*)?

Spiritual liberation is liberation connected with **formlessness** [the formless sphere].<sup>40</sup>

## IV c. AN ARHAT'S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE

**16** And what, bhikshus, is **superspiritual liberation** (*nirāmisā nirāmisā, taro vimokkha*)?

16.2 Bhikshus, when a monk, **whose influxes are destroyed**,  
reviews his mind liberated from *greed*,  
 reviews his mind liberated from *hate*,  
 reviews his mind liberated from *delusion*—**liberation** arises<sup>41</sup> [§8.2]—  
 this, bhikshus, is called **superspiritual liberation**.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>40</sup> *Arūpa-p, paṭisaṃyutto vimokkha nirāmisā vimokkha*. Here, “form” (*rūpa*) refers to both the sense-sphere as well as the form-sphere. It seems that having described dhyanic zest, etc, as “spiritual” (*nirāmisā*, lit, “non-carnal”), it seems contradictory to say that form-sphere liberation is “carnal.” Comy explains that form-sphere is described as “carnal” because one’s object is a carnal form (*attano ārammaṇa, bhūtena rūp’āmisā, vasen’eva s’āmisā nāma*, SA 3:85,3 f). However, a better explanation surely would be that “**form**” is a broad term encompassing both the sense-sphere and the form-sphere. See (1.1.2.2).

<sup>41</sup> The whole passage up to here: *Yo kho bhikkhave khīṇ’āsavassa bhikkhuno rāgā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, dosā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, mohā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, uppajjati vimokkha*. See (1.1.2.3).